

TOP SECRET

CONTROL NO.

Copy 2

REFERRED TO OFFICE	RECEIVED			RELEASED		SEEN BY	
	SIGNATURE	DATE	TIME	DATE	TIME	NAME & OFFICE SYMBOL	DATE
DCI							

• Handle Via Indicated Controls

DIS-K-E48363

25X1

.....

.....

.....

MORI C03224411

25X1

WARNING

TOP SECRET

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and declassification

[Attached to S Cover memo for the record, 10 June 1970]

28 May 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Impact on Egyptian-Israeli Military
Balance

Introduction

1. The introduction into Egypt of Soviet air defense elements has added a new dimension to the Arab-Israeli military equation, which hitherto had been dominated by Israel's air supremacy. This memorandum examines the scale of the Soviet involvement, and discusses the roles which the Soviet forces could play. The impact of the Soviet involvement on the Middle East balance is then assessed in terms both of quantitative and qualitative factors. A summary with conclusions is presented in the final paragraphs.

The Scale of Soviet Involvement

2. UAR air defense capabilities have been reinforced by the arrival in Egypt since late February of Soviet forces comprising an estimated four to five SA-3 regiments and three to five MIG-21 squadrons. These elements at normal strength would number about 4,000 to 5,000 men.

25X1

25X1

COPY NO. 2

Page Denied

25X1

4. The known SA-3 forces, including their radar-controlled, ZSU 23-4 antiaircraft artillery complements, amount to an estimated 2600-3700 men.

25X1

6. The three to five Soviet MIG-21 squadrons normally have a total complement of 36-60 aircraft and about 54-90 pilots.

25X1

These squadrons would involve about 1,500 Soviet personnel.

Soviet Air Defense Roles

7. The immediate purpose of the Soviet air defense deployments almost certainly was to support Nasir and protect Egypt from Israeli air attacks. The extent to which Soviet aims go beyond Nasir's mere survival are not yet apparent. A broader aim may be to secure for the Soviets a strategic position in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.

8. The impact of the Soviet involvement on the Arab-Israeli balance depends in large measure on Soviet self-restraint in pursuing their air defense

25X1

role. They could confine their interests to defense of the Nile Valley and Delta area, hoping simply to deter the Israelis from further deep penetration raids. Their presence would have more serious impact if they attempted to extend their protection to Egyptian forces deployed in the Suez Canal area. The Soviets would upset the balance most seriously, however, if they extended their air operations over the Sinai attacking Israeli ground targets.

Egyptian Air Defense Forces

9. Numerically speaking, the Soviet forces represent a significant -- though not dramatic -- augmentation of UAR air defense components. The UAR Air Force has an estimated 20 fighter-type squadrons equipped with some 310-330 operationally-assigned aircraft. There probably are sufficient pilots to man these squadrons, but not all of them would be combat-qualified.

25X1

Egyptian pilot losses in combat and training have been heavy, amounting to more than 90 in 1969 alone.

10. In addition, there are some 35 to 40 SA-2 battalions manned by Egyptian personnel. Since late 1969, a program to harden SAM sites in key areas has been undertaken.

Israeli Air Power

11. Israel's Air Force has been greatly strengthened in the last two years by the addition of 40 US F-4 Phantoms and 88 A-4 Skyhawks. Ten more Phantoms -- of which six are reconnaissance versions -- and 12 additional Skyhawks are still scheduled to be turned over to the Israelis. These planes enhanced the Israeli capability to stage deep penetration raids into Egypt and to carry out massive bombing attacks along the Suez Canal. The Israelis now have a total of 81 supersonic interceptor aircraft and about 175 ground support aircraft.

12. Israel's pilots and ground crews have superior qualities. Israel's 500 jet pilots are regarded as equal to those of the US Air Force. Most of the pilots have combat experience and are aggressive fighters. The Israelis are estimated to be capable of getting off five sorties per day whereas the Arabs can only get off about two per day.

The Unstriking Balance

13. The Arabs have always had a numerical edge, which has been hitherto offset by Israeli qualitative advantages. In terms of the so-called Western Front -- the direct UAR-Israeli confrontation -- the air equation has been near parity. The Egyptians have 120 interceptors against 81 for the Israelis, and 188 ground attack aircraft against 175. The addition of at least 40 Soviet-manned MIG-21s raises the Egyptian side of the interceptor ratio to 160 to 81.

14. Simple inventory comparisons are misleading, however. The Israeli aircraft have superior performance characteristics across the board. The Israeli F-4 Phantoms and Mirage III-Cs clearly outmatch the MIG-21 interceptors. Also, the A-4 Skyhawks -- and the Phantoms in a strike role -- can deliver more bombs over greater distances than the Egyptian-flown SU-7s and MIG-15/17s. Israeli pilots have been greatly superior to the Egyptians and, although the Soviets may be an improvement, they lack combat experience. The Israelis have better maintenance, and keep a greater proportion of their aircraft flying at all times -- about 85 percent for the Israelis to about 75 percent for the Egyptians. Again, the Soviets may do somewhat better than the Arabs, but will be pressed to match the Israelis. Finally, the Israelis cannot use their entire air force against the Egyptians because they must keep some reserve to deal with potential attacks from Jordan, Iraq or Syria.

15. A new factor in the balance is the potential impact of attrition on Israel in the event of a prolonged struggle for air supremacy. The Soviets are capable of maintaining a force of five interceptor squadrons in Egypt almost indefinitely, and could exhaust the Israelis not only in terms of aircraft but also in terms of pilots.

16. Israel's strategy for defeating the Arabs has been based upon preemptive attacks. Israel has always planned on fighting its wars on Arab ground. To minimize their casualties, the Israelis have devised tactics designed to prevent the Arabs from getting into combat. Some of these tactics were dramatically demonstrated in 1967 when the Israeli air force succeeded in virtually eliminating the Egyptian air forces within a few hours after the war broke out.

17. At least as far as Egypt is concerned, this strategy is probably no longer tenable. Very soon after the war the Egyptians began a widespread program of building new airfields and hardened aircraft shelters. [redacted] more effective air defense system consisting of SA-2 and SA-3 missiles, [redacted]

25X1

25X1

The possibility that the Israelis could repeat their 1967 success has been substantially reduced, and perhaps eliminated altogether.

18. This is the basis for Israel's present hard-nosed attitude about sticking to the Suez Canal line and not giving the Arabs any encouragement in thinking that the Israeli position might soften. The Israelis believe that possession of the Sinai ground and air space compensates for their likely inability to deliver another instant defeat to the Egyptians.

19. At the present time, Israel continues to maintain air superiority over Egypt, at least in the Canal area, and can still deliver punishing bombing attacks on the Egyptians. This superiority is reduced, however, by the reinforcement of the Egyptian air force with Soviet-manned MIG-21s. The psychological impact on both the Egyptians and Israelis could be significant.

20. Soviet actions will determine whether the balance of air power will continue to be favorable to Israel. Soviet air patrols within the Egyptian interior already have deterred the Israelis from renewing their deep penetration raids. Although they have abandoned this facet of their air operations, the Israelis have declared that they do not now intend to back off from hitting targets in the

Canal area. If Soviet pilots are ordered to keep the Israelis from bombing targets along the Canal, the air war will likely become a Russo-Israeli affair.

21. If the Soviet pilots now active in Egypt should engage the Israelis, we believe that, in the initial encounters, Israel's pilots would hold their own. At some point, Israel probably would either back off from its attacks in the Canal area or initiate some new moves designed to make the Soviets back off. Defense Minister Dayan has stated that Israel does not want to do battle with Soviet personnel and has acknowledged that if the USSR wishes to commit the needed resources, it can readily overwhelm Israel.

Summary and Conclusions

22. The extent to which the Soviet reinforcement of UAR air defense capabilities has shifted the Arab-Israeli balance against Israel is not yet clear. Moreover, the buildup of Soviet air defense elements in Egypt may not yet be complete. In terms of numbers alone, the three to five Soviet fighter squadrons and at least four to five SA-3 regiments already present in Egypt represent a substantial addition to the Arab side of the equation. Although Arab numbers have previously been offset by Israeli quality, the Soviet presence tends to reduce the disparity. Moreover, it connotes a new Arab-Soviet ability to exhaust the Israelis through attrition in a prolonged air struggle.

23. Perhaps more importantly, the Soviet presence may have rendered Israel's preferred strategy untenable. The Israelis already have been deterred from continuing deep penetration raids of the sort which contributed to the Soviet decision to expand their involvement.

24. We cannot measure precisely -- nor can the Israelis -- the extent to which a preemptive Israeli strike would reduce Soviet-Egyptian air capabilities. The vulnerability of the Egyptians to such an attack had already been reduced by the construction of hardened aircraft revetments. The further protection afforded by a partially Soviet-directed air defense system which includes Soviet-manned SA-3s and MIG-21s

will almost certainly add to the losses which the Israelis would suffer. Moreover, if the Israelis attacked the Soviet bases in Egypt, they would be risking a direct confrontation with the Soviets.

25. As long as the Soviets confine their operations to rear areas and the Israelis forego deep penetration raids, the apparent impact of the Soviet presence on the Arab-Israeli balance will be to restrict somewhat Israel's freedom of action in the air. If the Soviets, however, challenge Israel's air superiority in the area of the Suez Canal, the impact would be profound. Given a determination by the Soviets to stop the Israelis, and the much larger reserve of Soviet pilots and aircraft, Israel's air power would be quickly worn down. While the Israelis initially could hold their own, the anticipation of prolonged attrition could cause them either to abandon the canal line or to attempt a preemptive strike. In either event, the political consequences would overshadow the military. Similar consequences would flow more quickly and dramatically from extensive Soviet air attacks in the Israeli-occupied Sinai area.

26. On balance, the weight of the Soviet presence has already reduced the material and psychological advantages previously enjoyed by the Israelis. Fundamentally, the Arab-Israeli military balance now depends on Soviet actions and decisions which have already created a situation in which Israeli air superiority could be rapidly neutralized.